

we were everything by **lollercakes**

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Summary:

She was alone. But maybe not as alone as she thought.

we were everything

Jim Hopper and I were never friends. Acquaintances, sure. We shared a few classes, a few cigarettes, maybe a laugh once or twice, but we weren't friends. He was the kind of guy who had friends - loud, boisterous and drunk ones - and I was not. My circle was relegated to the disjointed ones, people who drank themselves silly and made questionable decisions because nobody really cared if we lived or died. That was my circle and I was staying in it, at least until I could get out of this town and free myself from the shithole where I lived and the class-act parents who failed to raise me right.

But that was all before today.

Here I was, minding my own damn business as I browsed the aisles of the local drugstore when I realized I hadn't bought a tampon or a pad in almost three months. Time had slipped by, I hadn't needed them, and sure, the signs were there but I refused to even acknowledge them. The weight gain was because I was working less at the diner. The puking? A spell of the flu. But this was much harder to deny and to say a chill ran through me would be an understatement.

My first thought was of my mother, young and unwed and desperate to escape her circumstances until she popped me out and was trapped for life. I couldn't ask her. That was an absolute no. She couldn't bear it and would probably pull out my Dad's belt, the sharp pain of it still distinct in my memory.

"Fucking hell," I croak and press my hands to my face, exhaling as I look up and down the aisle. A woman I recognize from church looks over at me and scowls, shaking her head and muttering to herself. Does she know? Can she tell?

I bolt from the store as quick as I can and high-tail it over to Lonnie's, the only other culprit for getting me into this mess who isn't me. When I get there he's already half wasted, eyes bloodshot and a stain on his white tank top. His slicked back hair is pressed down on one side, almost like he's just woken up, and his breath needs to see a toothbrush in the near future.

Pushing my way into his apartment I turn on him and lift a pointed finger, words freezing in my throat. He groans and collapses onto the couch, waving his hand as though edging me forward. "If you're going to lay into me, might as well get it over with," he hisses and pulls a sip of beer from his bottle.

"I... I'm," I struggle to put a sentence together and then it explodes from me, heavy as an anvil. "I think I'm pregnant!"

The silence rolls over us, Lonnie's frame prone on the couch as he stares into the wall. I bite my nail and wait for him to say something, anything. He doesn't though. Because he's Lonnie. Because he's always been short of words. Because that wasn't why I slept with him. I did it to forget the shit that haunted me and to try to get away from everything that pulled me down. It never worked, but dammit, this was the first time it was actively working against me.

"Well?" I hiss after a few moments, stepping in front of him and kicking his boot to rouse him.

"Well what? It ain't mine, that's for damn sure," he grunts. My insides curdle and twist, my stomach pitching south as a ringing sounds in my ears.

I stand there for another minute before kicking his boot again, jumping back when he lurches towards me and pushes me back against the living room wall. His hands are tight on my shoulders, his lean frame shadowing me as his face reddens.

“Don’t blame this on me, Joycie. You’re a loose woman and I won’t let you trap me like this,” he sneers before pushing away and pacing across the room. I nearly collapse with his release, my knees wobbling as the tears come hot and heavy to my eyes. I should have known this would be his answer. Should have known this would be my kind of shitty luck.

“You’re a real motherfucker, you know that Lonnie? It’s yours and now you’re not even going to own up to it. Going to just hang me out to dry?” I shout before I even realize I had the words in me. He turns on his heel and stalks towards me, his hand coming out to wrap around my neck. He doesn’t squeeze but I can see it in his eyes that he wants to, the fury and drink evident.

“It ain’t mine. Now get the hell out of my place before I kick your ass to the curb.”

The threat follows me out of his apartment, the vivid swearing and the crash of furniture behind his door telling me more than he’ll ever know. When I’m back out on the street I try to hash out some of my options but come up empty. Lonnie won’t help. My mother will kick me out and Dad? He’ll probably beat the shit out of me until there’s no more issue to deal with.

I’m alone. Knocked up and just barely finishing school, a shitty job at

a diner and no shoulder to cry on. I sink into myself at the realization as I start walking towards home, the house at the edge of town offering me one last chance at redemption.

My arrival goes unnoticed, like nearly every other day, and I try to keep it that way as I head upstairs to my room. I almost make it before my mother opens her bedroom door, frowning and leaning heavily on the jam. I can practically smell her from here, the booze leaking from her pores as she glances over at me.

“Why aren’t you in school?” She rasps, walking unsteadily in my direction.

“It’s Saturday, Mom.” I shift on my feet and back towards my room, wanting to get away before I spew the words into the empty space between us.

“What are you hiding then? You look suspicious.” Her eyes drop to my toes and scrape over me until she reaches my midline, brows furrowing as her gaze snaps up. “Girl, are you in the family way?”

How can she know? How can this drunk know the moment I realize it myself? Is it written on my face? Is it obvious and I was just in denial for so long? I barely get a chance to figure it out before she’s lunging towards me, arms outstretched and anger apparent on her face. She pushes me into my room and swears like a sailor, vowing to tell my father and cornering me near my closet. Covering my face with my hands is the best I can do to stop her onslaught of terror, my body slinking lower until I’m nearly curled in a ball.

Eventually she leaves to deal with her own shit, probably to drink some more but hopefully to go pass out and forget this conversation ever happened. I know it's unlikely but I wish for it anyways, slowly getting up and rifling through my drawers to change into something warmer. Below me I hear the front door slam in the familiar arrival of my father, a new level of fear coursing through my veins as I hear my mother cursing from the front hall.

Another second passes and my father's heavy steps rise up the staircase and towards my room, the clink of his belt audible even as I slide the window up and start to climb through it. I'm nearly gone when he bursts through the door and grabs at my wrist, yanking me back from my descent.

"Get up here now before I kill you, girl," he roars and twists, a bruise inevitably starting to form from his grip. I shake my head and try to loosen his hand, panic driving me to get further away from him than ever before.

"Let go!" I scream and snap, pushing away from the house with my feet until he let's go and I tumble head over heels down the roof and onto the ground with a thump. I land like a broken doll, my head fuzzy and my body aching, but get to my feet before he can make it through the front door and see me escape into the trees.

I wander for hours in the forest, thinking through my options and coming up empty. There was nowhere to turn for help in Hawkins, at least not for unwed teenage mothers. Here we were left on our own, scorned for daring to live and ostracized because the men who got us into this position were too pathetic to do what was right.

Breaking through the treeline I find myself on the edge of the quarry,

the outcropping of rock familiar as a place where things ended. I didn't want to keep doing this, covering up the bruises that marred my skin and my soul. It was exhausting and only getting worse, especially now that I was going to have a baby with someone who clearly had no interest in being a father.

The idea of escape floats into my mind then, hovering over me as I stand on the edge of the rock to watch the sun start to set, a last beautiful evening to see me off. There was always something in the way the breeze floated around me that felt comforting, like maybe this was what was meant for me.

Misery pushes me forward and I look down at the pool of water that lay dark and ominous below. I could slip and fall, crash into the abyss and never come up. It would mean I could stop struggling. That I could finally be free of this place and the people in it. Inching closer again my toe kicks forward a rock that falls over the edge, crashing and colliding with the bits down below.

"Hey," a familiar voice calls out from behind me, startling me until I lose my footing and tumble down. I land on my side, the air knocked from my lungs as I slip and grapple at the ground as my body slides further over the edge.

"Help me!" I scream and thrash, trying to hold on as I move closer to letting go. All the thoughts from just moments ago disappear as I fight to stay alive, if only to meet the baby growing inside of me.

"Woah, it's okay!" Jim grunts, getting onto his stomach and reaching his arms down towards me. One hand grabs at my collar and the other wraps around my elbow, his arms lifting me back up until I can swing my leg over the ledge. "Jesus Joyce, what are you doing?"

I keep my mouth shut until I'm back on top of the rock, the air heavy as I suck it back with deep wracking breaths. "Don't surprise people like that," I scold, trying to hold it together.

I fail. The tears come once more and soon Jim is crawling towards me and scooping me up in his arms, his body wrapping itself around mine as I sob into his training jersey. He smells of sweat and old aftershave, the heat rolling off of him soothing me in a way I hadn't expected.

"Hey, it's okay. Really. It's okay. You're alive. Didn't die or anything," he whispers and clumsily pats my head, pulling back only once I've stopped crying long enough to let him look down at me. "What were you doing here, standing so close to the edge like that? Don't you remember Teddy Brown? The kid in grade school who got too close and fell?"

I pull away, a hand coming to rub the tears from my face. "Maybe I didn't need rescuing," I mumble and shift, putting space between us.

"Come on now, I wasn't just going to let you fall." He leans back on his hands and I blink from the sight of him. He's sweaty and a mess but his smile is soft and kind, the same type that he gives when he lights my cigarettes for me. At least, it is that smile until he takes in my whole rumpled appearance and the bruising along my arm. "Joyce," he starts, sits forward and reaches out a hand for mine.

"I wanted to jump." My voice cracks and his smile disappears, his posture tightening as I duck my head in shame. His fingers ghost up my arm and slide to my neck, his breath catching as a sob hiccups

out of me. Another second passes and he gets to his knees, arms wrapping around me and his hand cradling my head against his shoulder.

“It’s going to be okay,” he whispers into my hair, a slow hand rubbing against my back. It feels like a lie being curled up against him, like a false sense of comfort, but I lean into it anyways and try to get lost in the feeling of it. I don’t remember the last time I felt like this, like someone cared, and it’s a raw wound that splits and festers.

It’s sometime later before he eventually pulls away, his fingers grazing my cheek and brushing my bangs away from my face. His expression is unreadable and I have to close my eyes from his searching gaze because it feels like he’ll know all my secrets if I let him in.

God, do I want to let him in.

“Do you want a lift somewhere? I’ve got my Dad’s truck out on the highway. It’s a bit of a hike but it’d save you the walk home.” His offer is sweet, kind, the type of thing that I used to scorn, but right now it feels like a lifevest in a stormy sea.

“I don’t have - I can’t go home,” I reply lowly. My hands open and close, sliding protectively across my belly as my eyes slip up to his.

“That’s okay. We’ve got this old army cot I can set up in the garage. You can stay there for the night until we can figure out what to do next. Come on.” He gets to his feet and reaches a hand down towards me, a gentle giant to my too small frame. I take it and we head

through the trees to the edge of the road, his hand on my back the entire way.

Once inside the cab he starts the engine and turns up the heat, a hand reaching out and bringing mine from my lap to the vents, holding them there. I look at him then, this boy who I barely knew, who was saving me from myself. We'd spent years in the same school, the same classes, and while we'd spoken, it had never really been about anything real. He'd been a fixture, like a lightbulb, always there but never noticed until the light went out.

"Thank you," I mumble when he eventually lets go of my hands, his own coming to rest on the wheel and gearshift.

Pulling away from the grass he gives me a look, one I can't decipher, and starts off down the road. We sit in silence for a while before he asks me something too low to hear. I frown and look at him, waiting for the sentence to come around again. "What made you want to jump?" I shrug at his question and look out the window, avoiding and hiding from what I didn't want to admit.

The drive back to his place is quiet after that, neither of us wanting to press on the subject. When we pull into the drive the lights are on in every window, the house leaning over me as I slip from the passenger seat. I hold onto the door to ground me as he walks towards the front entrance, giving him space to go inside and open the garage without rising the suspicion of his parents. I figure hiding out is the least I can do since he's letting me stay here, but when he reaches the door and looks back it's confusion that paints his features.

"Joyce!" He calls out, concern evident as he jogs back towards the

truck. He lets out a breath when he sees me still there, wide eyed and pale. "Come on, we're going this way." He motions with his head back to the house and let's me walk in front of him, the heat of his chest rolling off him in waves.

Together we step inside the house and into a cheerful hallway, painted bright and tidy. I watch as he toes off his shoes and heads towards the kitchen, his tall form filling the space as he leans into the room. A moment later his parents look around the door jam, his mother's face pinching as her head shakes. There's whispering that I can't quite make out, his father nodding and pushing past him to go upstairs. His mother rests a hand on his shoulder and steps around him, coming to stand in front of me with a soft smile on her lips.

"Would you like some tea, dear?" She asks, her hands clasped together as Jim looks back at us.

"No, I don't want to be any bother," I answer. Instinctively I wrap my arms around myself and look away, a practice familiar with people who are too soft and too kind for me. The move has the opposite effect on her and she gasps at the sight of me, the blotchy bruises evident in the bright light of the hallway.

"It's not - oh my dear," she shakes her head and looks back at her son, a hand coming up to her lips. Colour creeps up my neck and burns my cheeks with embarrassment, my desire to escape flooding my senses. A moment later her husband appears in the stairwell, arms loaded with blankets.

It's all too much. I wasn't built for this kindness, this pity. My family would never take in a stray, especially one who looked like me, and I didn't know how to deal with the anguish that seemed to fill the air

the longer I stood there. With my hand on the doorknob I turn to leave, the air thinning and causing me to hyperventilate as I try to get it open. Jim is there then, his steadying hand on my shoulder forcing me to look up at him.

“Please, Joyce. Just stay the night.”

I close my eyes and picture the alternative, sleeping outside as the air chilled and the grass cooled. I’d likely freeze, or at least catch a cold, and then I’d have to face all of this alone operating at half of my capacity. The vision of it forces me to nod, a relieved sigh escaping from one of the Hopper’s.

The next hour is like an odyssey. I’m given some of Jim’s old clothes and access to a shower, the warm water like a balm to my broken down frame. When I exit the shower it’s to find Jim waiting on the made up couch, his outfit changed from his running attire but his hair still matted slightly from sweat.

“Thank you, for this,” I say from the entrance to the room, my arms wrapped tightly around my ball of clothes. I hold them in front of my belly, just in case the evidence of my real problems are apparent.

“You scared me up there at the quarry,” he admits as he gets up from the couch, stepping away so that I can sit down. I tuck myself into the blankets and pull them up to my neck, my knees drawn in towards me as I watch him pace and then slide down next to me with his back leaned against the couch.

“I didn’t - I mean, it wasn’t my intention, I just - “

“I know it wasn’t. I’ve just never had to do that and now I can’t stop worrying about you. What’s so bad that you wanted to hurt yourself?” He leans against his knees and hides his face as he asks, the question burning the air around us.

“I think I’m knocked up and I don’t have anybody really. It sounds pathetic but I’m scared. I didn’t know what else to do.” I whimper and curl up tighter, bracing myself for the rejection that was bound to come.

But it doesn’t. Jim simply turns and looks at me, steady gaze levelling against mine. “It’s gonna be alright,” he assures me. I nod because it’s all I can do, the argument dying on my lips as he leans back and rests his head against my legs.

I fall asleep not much later, carried away by the sound of his deep breaths marking his own rest. When I wake up I find him closer, his body stretched out on the floor and his hands wrapped around mine as it hangs off the couch. I disentangle myself and sit up, glancing around the dimly lit room and finding the sun starting to creep in through the windows. The guilt is heavy on my chest as I climb down and over him, careful not to wake him as I slip to the bathroom.

Splashing some water on my face, I examine my arms and the shades of blue and red that stretch along my skin. I look a wreck, like someone who has been through a meat grinder, and it takes me a second to fight back the angry tears that threaten to give way. I won’t let this define me. I can’t let this beat me down.

Back outside in the living room I round the corner to find Jim already

on his feet, hands in his hair as he spins towards me with a shocked expression. "I thought you'd gone," he states, lowering his arms and rubbing his hands across his face.

"Just a bathroom break," I reply. We stand at odds for another drawn out moment before he nods briskly.

"I think Dad wanted to talk to you this morning. To uh, take a statement?" The words run a chill over my skin, the gooseflesh rising as I look at the floor. I knew this was a trap. I knew this was nothing more than a way to reel me in and make me a snitch.

"I have to go," I counter, sidestepping around him and grabbing my clothes from the floor. I slam my way back into the bathroom and hurry to change, stumbling into my pants and shoving my bralette in my pocket. When I re-emerge he's standing at the door, panic etched into his face.

"You don't have to go - just stay for breakfast. Let us help you," he tries to offer, tries to plead as I slip on my shoes. I give him a withering look as he blocks my exit, a sigh pushing out of him when he eventually steps aside. "Joyce," he says as he follows me onto the porch, his voice growing more distant as I put space between us. "I know we haven't really been friends, but I do care. I've always cared. Even if you didn't realize..."

I sprint away from his promises. From his lies and his hope. I leave him standing on his front porch, agony in every facet of his being as I head somewhere, anywhere, far away from the life I could never have.

Jim Hopper and I were never friends. We were two kids who grew up together, who caught each others eye in class and shared smiles in the hallway. Shared smokes and brief touches, shared secrets and honest truths. Sure our paths crossed on some occasions, but we were never friends. He was more than that to me. I was more than that to him. And it took us a whole lot of heartbreak to finally realize that we weren't friends, we were everything.